

Ferrara-Pignatelli di Strongoli Family Coat of Arms (1900s)
Measures 66 x 44 inches
Recovered by Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE)



On June 12, 2009, ICE Attaché Rome will host a repatriation ceremony of an Italian tapestry depicting the family coat of arms of the Ferrara Pignatelli di Strongoli family at the U.S. Embassy in Rome.

In July 2008, ICE Attaché Rome and ICE Wichita initiated an investigation pertaining to information received regarding the expressed interest of a U.S. serviceman to return a tapestry depicting an Italian family coat of arms. The Attaché Rome, with the assistance of the Italian Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale (TPC), determined that the tapestry belonged to the Ferrara Pignatelli Di Strongoli family in Naples, Italy.

A family member of the U.S. serviceman described to ICE Agents the circumstances on how his father “rescued [the tapestry] from a bombed out villa north of Naples during World War II” and brought it to the United States at the end of the war.

ICE Agents contacted a family member for the U.S. serviceman, who described the circumstances on how his father “rescued [the tapestry] from a bombed out villa north of Naples during World War II” and brought it to the United States at the end of the war. The following is his recount:

“This story begins with the invasion of Italy by the allied forces at Salerno Bay where I landed near the town of Paestum on September 9, 1943. The troops were held up by the Germans for a few days by their artillery fire, but the push north to Naples got under way. The Italian army had laid down their weapons and helped the Allied forces. Benito Mussolini had been driven out of command the day after the invasion.

We stopped at a position that overlooked the Bay of Naples for a few days. It turned out to be one of the most memorable during the war. The Germans bombers would make bombing runs at night since allied ships were at the docks to unload and some were waiting to move in. So many flares were dropped that the entire harbor was illuminated, the bombs were bursting and the anti-aircraft guns from our forces were firing tracer shells. This presented a spectacular sight and it was further enhanced by the eruption of the Vesuvius volcano just to the East. This awesome sight will never be forgotten.

After a few days, we advanced further North and that is when I came to the ruins of a villa while by myself on a scouting reconnaissance. It looked as if the villa had been destroyed by artillery fire and was probably used by the Germans for a command post. It was raining, but I made my way into the debris. That is when I

saw the Coat-of-Arms painting. It was raining on it and would be ruined if left to the elements. So I took it and drove back a few miles to camp where I could dry the canvas. I had no way of finding the owner at this time, so I decided to send it home to the states for safe keeping with intention that after the war I would locate the royal family.

I sent the painting to my parent's home in the states for safe keeping but never heard that it was received. This was in the fall of 1943. I had forgotten about the Crest by the time I departed from Italy two years later near Lake Garda on the Austrian border. The European Pacific wars had ceased by then, so we shipped back to the states and home.

In 1970, my mother died and while disposing of her belongings, I found the Coat-of-Arms on a shelf, neatly folded and in fairly good condition except for some faint crease marks----it had been there for years and I never knew it.

I was anxious to find the owner, so my wife and I went to Italy on a two week tour. Our tour guide was an Italian lady who spoke English fluently. I gave her a picture of the Crest for her to identify this family. She tried her best thru friends and libraries but was not successful. I also went to more than one library in the states going thru the Heraldry sections.

I went back to Italy a second time and joined three of my fellow army buddies to pay tribute to those who had fallen during the invasion. We went to Paestum on September 9, 1993, exactly fifty years after that landing. Standing on this peaceful beach now was overwhelming from fifty years ago. A stone monument had been erected to honor the 36th army division's landing there. However, I had no luck on this trip for identifying the owner of the Coat-of-Arms.

Since then, my son became involved in the search. With the computer age and the networking system, he spent a considerable amount of time searching for a reliable source of information. He was successful and this all brings me to peace of mind that this Coat-of-Arms is now being returned to Italy and the rightful owner."

The history of the tapestry dates back to the early 1900s, depicting the coat of arms of the family Pignatelli and Ferrara from the union in marriage between Emilia Pignatelli di Strongoli and Ferdinando Ferrara. The tapestry is composed of the three pots symbolizing the Pignatelli coat of arms and the three stars with a compass and the three mountains symbolizing the Ferrara coat of arms. The family crest could be found in a book entitled "*Libro d'oro della Nobilta Italiana, 1940-1949*", page 415.

The Ferrara Pignatelli di Strongoli family stated that the tapestry was previously located in Villa Reale of Torcino, hunting residence of the Bourbons, then Savoias and finally of the Pignatelli di Strongoli family. During World War II, the villa was seized by the Germans and prior to retreating to Monte Cassino, the Germans blew up the villa with all its contents with the exception of certain items. Other locations of ownership by the family included Palazzo Ferrara

di Eboli and the Castello di Battipaglia. All of these locations were raided and destroyed during the invasion of World War II.

In December 2008, the tapestry was voluntarily abandoned by the U.S. serviceman to ICE Wichita and in April 2009, the tapestry was turned over to the ICE Attaché Rome.